

Hospital Workers

Fort Point had a small hospital for sick soldiers. The person in charge was called a hospital steward. The soldiers who helped him were called attendants or nurses. They had a special book of rules and regulations to tell them what to do.

Here are some of those rules and regulations quoted directly from the Hospital Steward's Manual, J.J. Woodward, U.S. Army, 1862.

Hospital Steward

The hospital steward is a non-commissioned officer; he ranks with ordnance sergeants and next above the first sergeant of a company. He is therefore entitled by his rank to obedience from all enlisted men who may be in the hospital, whether patients, ward-masters, nurses, or employees, who must cheerfully and promptly comply with all his reasonable and lawful commands.

For disobedience of orders, neglect of duty, drunkenness, or any other military offense, the hospital steward may be placed in arrest by the commanding officer, and may be tried and punished by court-martial, as is the case of the enlisted men.

The pay of a hospital steward appointed by the Secretary of War is \$30 a month, with one ration a day, and the clothing allowance of an enlisted man.

A hospital steward must be temperate, honest and in every way reliable, as well as sufficiently intelligent, and skilled in pharmacy.

Hospital Attendants or Nurses

Enlisted soldiers served as nurses and were entitled to twenty-five cents daily "extra duty pay," for service as a hospital attendant or nurse. They are excused from all other duty but must attend the parades for muster and weekly inspections of their companies at the post unless specifically excused by the commanding officer.

Sobriety, intelligence, and cheerful obedience to all lawful commands are important qualifications for hospital attendants. Those who work hard can be promoted to hospital steward by the surgeon.

These duties are important, and require sobriety, loyalty and intelligence on the part of the attendant to whom they are entrusted. Great care must be taken in the selection of the chief nurse.

Daily Schedule of Hospital Workers

Reveille, at 6:30 a.m. in winter, and 5 a.m. in summer.

Morning roll call, fifteen minutes after.

Breakfast call, 7 a.m. in winter, and 6 a.m. in summer.

Surgeon's call, 9 a.m. in winter, and 8:30 a.m. in summer.

Dinner, 12 p.m., preceded by noon roll call when so ordered.

Surgeon's evening call, 5 p.m.

Supper, 6 p.m.

Tattoo and evening roll call, 8 p.m.

Taps (lights out), 9 p.m.

Commanding Officer

In post hospitals it is usual for the commanding officer to complete his Sunday morning inspection by inspecting the hospital with the assistance of the surgeon. The hospital should be neat and clean. Those patients who are sitting up should be neatly dressed in uniform, with their faces and hands clean, hair neatly brushed and shoes well blacked. The attendants and stewards should appear in full dress uniform according to their rank.

Chief Nurse

The chief nurse will see that the beds are made up in the morning; that chamber pots, bed pans and urinals are emptied whenever used; that the ward is properly swept and cleaned daily; that the meals of those patients who are confined to bed are given to them at the proper hour; that those patients who can walk to the common table are assembled at the dinner hour and marched to the dining hall; that all medicines are received promptly and given to patients; that the hospital has air free from unpleasant odors; that the hospital is properly lighted at night and warmed in the wintertime; and that all the rules established by the surgeon are carried out.

Nurses

The nurse also is immediately responsible for the personal cleanliness of the patients under his charge. A nurse ensures that when patients are able to do so, they wash themselves daily, and change their underclothes at least once a week. When the patient is unable to wash himself and change his clothes, these duties must be performed for him by the nurse.

When patients need to use the bed pan, urinal or chamber pot, the nurse should give it to them. Immediately after one of these is used, the nurse must carry it out of the ward, empty it, cleanse it, and return it to its place. On no account should containers with urine be allowed to remain even for a few minutes in the hospital.

Bedbugs are best avoided if the beds are clean. Beds must be wiped with soap and water. Lice may be removed by the use of the fine-toothed comb or strong soap and water.

One nurse should be assigned to sweep and clean the floor, walls and windows; another maintains the fires and manages the lights; a third cleans the bathroom.

The nurse should remember that absolute obedience is expected. Every time he disobeys or neglects the surgeon's orders, a patient's life is threatened. It is not for the nurse to judge: the surgeon is responsible.

Hospital Rules

These rules were posted in the fort and the soldiers had to obey them:

No patient will be allowed to leave the hospital without permission from the surgeon in charge. The same rule will hold with respect to nurses and other attendants.

No pass will be issued except between the hours of 10 a.m. and 12 p.m., except in urgent cases. The pass will be shown to the guard on post.

No smoking, swearing or loud talking will be permitted in the wards and passages of this hospital; and spitting on the floor, or defacing the building in any way, is positively forbidden.

The beds will be made every morning by the attendants, or more often if necessary. Patients able to do so will make their own beds.

No patient will occupy his bed without undressing.

Every patient who is able will wash his face and hands at least every morning, and keep the rest of his body in a clean condition.

No loud noises or improper language will be allowed in the wards at any time. All talking will cease at 8:30 p.m.

Lounging about the halls is also forbidden.

No provisions or liquors of any kind shall be brought within the hospital without permission of the medical officer of the day. Nor will any relatives or friends of patients be allowed to give such supplies to them, without permission from the medical officers of the ward.

Patients will give prompt obedience to the stewards, ward-master and nurses in all lawful commands. Any infractions of discipline, disobedience to orders, drunkenness or disorderly conduct will be promptly punished.

Diseases of the Time

There were certain diseases that were very common in the late 1800s when the soldiers lived at Fort Point.

Typhoid fever gave a patient a bad fever, pain in the back, arms and legs, headache, stomach ache and loss of appetite. It is caused by a bacterium which lives in unclean food and water. The worst part (which doctors did not understand) is that someone who is cured from the fever continues to carry the disease. The cured person can pass it on, unless people are very careful to keep their hands and bodies clean. Any type of filthy condition caused this disease to spread rapidly.

Fluxes was another serious type of illness. Today we call it dysentery. The main symptom is diarrhea. The food travels so fast through the intestine that the body cannot absorb water or minerals and vitamins. A patient with flux often (but not always) has fever, stomach cramps, no appetite and watery stools and may dehydrate.

Now we know that the germ which causes dysentery lives in dirty water and food. It first lives in the intestines and then travels throughout the body. Even today it is hard to treat bad cases of dysentery. Some medicines that would have helped (paregoric and opium) were known to the doctors, but they did not use them for this disease.

Pneumonia also caused many deaths. Some soldiers, weakened by exposure to wet and cold weather, got infected lungs. Sometimes, a soldier got one disease, was weakened, and then died of pneumonia. A patient with pneumonia would have a fever, a dry cough, pain in the chest and chills.

Today, most people can put up with the germ which causes pneumonia and not get sick. This is because of good health, diets, and modern drugs. The germ which causes pneumonia is found in the noses and throats of many healthy people. Sometimes good food, a mustard plaster, and tender care were able to conquer pneumonia. Doctors had medicines to stop the cough and quinine could reduce a high fever.

Malaria presented another problem. Doctors thought malaria came from "stagnant waters" (drinking water which was standing still -- not running, like a stream or river). Now we understand that it is carried by a certain mosquito, which actually lays its eggs and lives near stagnant water. This was not discovered until 1902.

Patients with malaria would have a high fever, sweats and chills and general weakness all over their body. Quinine was the main treatment. Today we have much better medicines. However, quinine is still good for treating the symptoms of this bad disease.

Other diseases, called "eruptive fevers" because they caused rashes or sores on the skin, were smallpox, measles and scarlet fever. Usually, people catch these diseases in childhood, recover and can't catch them again. However, soldiers from small towns may not have been exposed to these diseases as children.

These diseases are more serious if one catches them as an adult. Sometimes an entire regiment of soldiers would be hit by one of these diseases - one

soldier passing it to others. Men would become desperately sick with chills and burning fever.

Doctors were beginning to understand about vaccinations. In a vaccination, a person is given a tiny amount of the germ which causes the disease. This isn't enough to make him sick, but it is enough for his body to develop resistance so he won't catch the disease. Sometimes even vaccinations did not work.

Medical Practices

None of the modern drugs and medicines that we know today was used during the 1850s and 1860s. Doctors used home and herbal remedies. However, there were four or five drugs that helped patients.

Quinine was the "wonder" drug of the time. It was mainly used as a treatment for malaria, a deadly disease passed by mosquitoes. It was even used for other problems including fever and diarrhea. Doctors also used it to clean wounds and as a gargle. It was very bitter!

Morphine was used as a pain killer. Sometimes the powder was dusted directly onto a wound.

Chloroform and ether were both used as anesthetics. Doctors preferred chloroform because it would not burst into flames. Ether could be very dangerous to use when the hospitals were lit by lanterns and candles.

Alcohol (whiskey) was used for "whatever ails you!" Alcohol generally was not helpful and often made the patient worse.

Doctors did not generally understand that disease was usually carried by germs. So, they did not make sure that their hands and tools were clean before treating patients. Some medicines which would have been excellent germ-killers were only used as deodorants -- to make the stinking hospitals smell better.

Leeching

Leeches are small, pond animals that suck blood from the patient and hopefully the sickness out as well. They were used commonly in the 1850s and 1860s. Below are directions that were given to the hospital workers:

In the application of leeches, the surface to which they are to be applied must first be prepared by washing it carefully with warm water. If the part is hairy, it should be shaved. To make the leeches take hold more readily, the parts on which it is designed for them to fasten may be moistened with sugar and water, or still better, with blood drawn from the tip of the finger.

The leeches are applied a few at a time, and as these take hold others are added, until the whole number directed have fastened upon the part. As each fills, he lets go his hold and falls off; but if from any cause it is desired to remove them, sooner or later they may be made to let go their hold by putting common salt upon them. The leech should not be pulled off by violence, lest a portion of its head be broken off and remain in the wound, thus causing unnecessary irritation and killing the animal.

After the leeches are removed, bleeding may be encouraged, if so directed, by applications of warm water or of a warm poultice, or it may be checked, after carefully washing the part with cold water, by simple exposure to the air. Sometimes, however, the bleeding is quite profuse, and may resist this simple measure, in which case a sharp-pointed stick of nitrate of silver, introduced into the little bleeding orifices, will generally be found efficient.

Leeches may be kept on hand in good condition, for a long time, in tubs filled with water, at the bottom of which turf or peat is placed: the water should be changed about once a week. After the leeches have been used, some means should be employed to evacuate the blood they have gorged; otherwise, they generally die. This may be done by sprinkling them with salt, or pouring salt water upon them, which causes them to eject the contents of their stomachs.

A better plan, perhaps, is with a thumb-lancet make two small punctures on the back of the leech, one on each side of the median line: through these the blood escapes, and the little wound subsequently heals. Once used,

leeches should be kept in a vessel separate from the others for two or three weeks after which those which survive may be again employed.